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new European architecture

# A10



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# A10

## new European architecture

### #50

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## Small-scale simplicity

INDIRA VAN 'T KLOOSTER

Great Britain, land of illegal horse meat and European financial uproar, keeps thoughts rather busy these days. Now that Germany seems to have more affinity with the British political course, France seeks support in Spain, Poland and Italy in the budget battle for 2014–2020. This is not just a confrontation between rich and poor countries, or the choice between solidarity and sovereignty. The actual commitment is to a vision of the future. 'We continue the policies of the past, almost unchanged, without asking ourselves whether such policy is still valid,' stated Nicolas Barré in *Les Echos*. And what about the budget of 373 billion euros (30 per cent of the total budget) for agriculture? How old-fashioned is that? The financial negotiations have disappointed many. Where is the innovation in technology, industry, culture, social systems, education and knowledge? How will Europe guard itself against the emerging economies in Asia and South America?

In Europe, it seems that attention is no longer focused on growth. In Estonia, for instance, a monetary system has appeared (*isePankur*, or self-banker; see [www.isepankur.ee](http://www.isepankur.ee)) that is similar to the microcredit that has become the norm in developing countries. In several countries, urban agriculture is back on the spatial agenda. Mosques, synagogues and even churches are providing

a mini-boom in architectural production. The concept that combines all these trends might be called 'small-scale simplicity'. Within it, you want to provide for your own food, independent of what multinationals dictate your food should be. You get to decide what you want to produce, believe, or purchase. You do not need complex financial contracts to buy a new lounge suite. Architects understand this. They go in search of tasks and assignments that are within reach, and which contribute to the need for small-scale, somewhat nostalgic simplicity. Not feasible on a large scale, but worthwhile in miniature. Read, for example, about the New Wave in Scotland (p. 44), or a temporary library in a 16th-century Bulgarian bathhouse by Studio 8½ (p. 9), or the production of religious buildings in Germany (p. 24). There is innovation, but it is found in the area of the small, not the big. Not in terms of growth, but in well-being. Typical recession behaviour.

Somewhere therein lies the difficulty. 'Europe' is about large scale, but not necessarily about the relationship of the individual with respect to well-being, spatial quality and innovation. The individual seeks natural comfort and quality, but not necessarily at the scale of public interest. Really complicated stuff. Except for a certain region in the United Kingdom (p. 38). As soon as it is independent, this region could become part of the European Union. 'Europe' stands to gain much from this. For years the Scots have had an architectural policy that tackles these types of (scale) problems – one that often achieves successful results. ←

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## Prefab wooden house, Pedrezuela

*Elii shaped this low-budget, modular and very adaptable dream house solution according to the wishes of their client.*

SPAIN — TEXT: GONZALO HERRERO DELICADO & MARÍA JOSÉ MARCOS, PHOTOGRAPHY: MIGUEL DE GUZMÁN

Isabel, a veterinarian who works day after day among horses, decided that she wanted to live in the countryside, to move away from the city and to have a house in accordance with her lifestyle, one that would allow her more direct contact with nature. She had several ideas in mind for this house, though a number were wishes she could not easily connect — images of houses she had seen either in magazines or on television, measured against desires for an Alpine-style house, a modular wooden home or a self-sufficient concept house, amongst others. One day her path crossed with Elii, a Madrid-based firm comprising Uriel, Eva and Carlos, which

↓ Floor plan



has gained previous recognition through publicized projects like the 'Urban Tree', an artificial tree promoting public fitness and which simultaneously generates energy, or 'Insider', the transformation of a little apartment in Zaragoza that can be constantly reorganized according to the changing needs of its users. Isabel decided that Elii was the perfect choice to 'architecturalize' her wishes and give shape to her house. The result was the 'House of Would'.

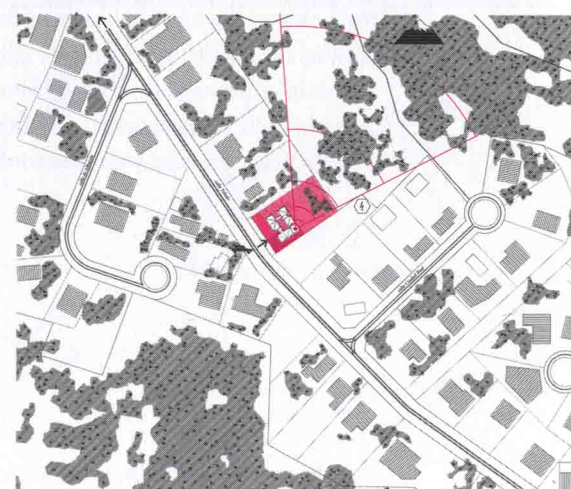
The house stands on a sloping plot of land approximately 1200 square metres in size in the community of Pedrezuela, a twenty-minute drive from Madrid. The plot has some veg-

↓ Section

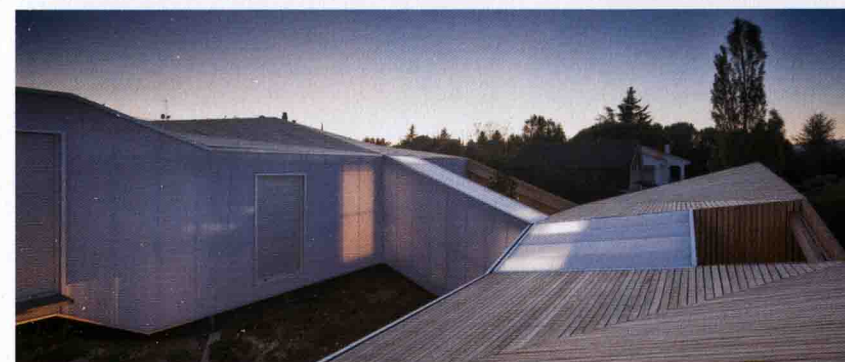


etation on the side closest to the access road, and a garden crammed full of plants on the opposite side, creating an enjoyable backdrop for views from the inside the house. According to the client's dream house requirements, Elii decided to create a modular, prefab wooden house. This resulted in a very useful strategic decision to build the house in barely six months, which lent the project extra value by significantly reducing the construction budget. The seven modules of the House of Would are arranged somewhat like a Möbius strip, each adapting to the uneven land beneath, while creating a private, shaded central yard in which residents can relax or cultivate a garden. The client thought the house could work as an assembly line where, for instance, she could arrive directly by car in the garage, take off her dirty work shoes, and then access her bedroom to enjoy a soothing bath after a stressful day. The upward-spiraling floor design fitted that wish perfectly. Another curious petition from the client was to permit her dogs to traverse the entire plot with total freedom. To accommodate this, Elii slightly elevated the house to allow the dogs passage from outside to the inner courtyard.

↓ Site plan



↑↓ The distinct modules circle in an upward spiral while adhering to the contours of the site.



↓ Internal corridors form transitions from one domestic segment to the next. ↑ Facade of wooden slats



Another interesting element is the roof, which undulates with the surrounding land, creating an artificial topography that can even be used as a private solarium hidden from neighbours' views. The sloping roof sections are also arranged to collect and divert rain, watering the garden in the central courtyard. By joining the seven separate modules, different spaces are created within the home, allowing for public and private interaction. The wooden modules are linked with internal corridors that bridge the differences in site elevation. The modules are joined together by a slatted wooden envelope, which creates natural ventilation and air flow to the interior while also unifying the separate segments. The design of the facade is based on a trapezoidal model — its symmetrical, singular form incredibly simplified construction and thus shortened the time needed for assembly. The plans show a continuous geometrical game between elevations and roofs, combining both the various elements and functions. But the use of a modular system has a second reading, which the architects explain as follows: 'The modular organization and the scale of the spaces mean that the functional logic can be modified if necessary, acting as the basis for any future changes.' The versatile home is poised for future change, expansion and adaptability.

It is obvious to many that the current, critical economic situation, mainly prevalent in southern European countries, has drastically damaged the architectural panorama, not only in the quantity of built productions but also in building techniques. Prefabrication is an easy and profitable choice for construction at the moment, and wood seems to be an affordable and sustainable material. The House of Would therefore joins other Spanish examples of how both wood and prefab are excellent solutions for small-scale projects, such as the EX House by Jacobo García Germán (see A10 #48), A House for Three Sisters by Blancafort-Reús Arquitectura, or even the Endesa pavilion by IAAC (see Section, p. 57). ←

### HOUSE OF WOULD, 2012

Architect: Elii (Uriel Fogué, Eva Gil, Carlos Palacios)  
Client: Isabel Rodríguez  
Address: Pedrezuela, Madrid  
Info: www.elii.es

